

Liberalization And The Woman Worker

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There is a great deal of debate on the effects of liberalization on the poor and on workers. Positions seemed to have polarized where those who support liberalization say that there has been a decrease in poverty and an increase in general well-being, and those who oppose it saying that in fact poverty has increased, employment opportunities and access to social services have declined.

In this article we have attempted to look at the effects of liberalization by examining the micro, rather than the macro picture. We have looked at a number of sectors where women workers are concentratedⁱ and have tried to analyse the trends in those sectors. We have preferred to look at it this way because our aim is not only to analyse but also to look for ways by which the position of women workers can be strengthened, their opportunities and lives bettered and their vulnerabilities decreased. So, we have concluded this article with a number of recommendations.

We have placed the woman worker, in particular the poor woman worker, at the centre of our analysis. It is her labour and enterprise which creates the wealth of the nation, and whose hard work leads to national growth. She needs security, a decent life, a share in the prosperity of the nation and the dream of a good life for her children. In a way, the change in economy has brought about a visibility for the women worker which did not exist before. The term 'feminisation of labour' is now widely used and women are becoming more visible in many areas of work which was traditionally barred to them.

The elements of liberalization and globalization have been explained and analysed in great detail in many places. But before we move forward it is important to mention some of the main features of liberalization as we understand it. In India, it has meant the opening of trade by reduction of import duties and removal of quantitative restrictions. It has also meant entering the WTO regime. Along with easing of restrictions on external trade, there has also been a removal of some internal restrictions on movement of commodities. At the same time, there has been a considerable loosening of the licensing systems, especially on the private sector of firms, as well as lifting of reservations for many products. At the same time there has been an integration of production globally, but also across the country internally. There has been rapid privatization of Government owned companies, of State or community held resources, of hitherto reserved area like banking and insurance. At the same time there has been deregulation of labour protection leading to massive growth of contract labour and sub-contracting.

EMPLOYMENT, INCOME AND LIBERALIZATION POLICIES

We found that liberalization has caused an increasing inequality in employment opportunities and incomes. Economic opportunities created by the liberalization

are highly unequal. Those better endowed, with more access to skills, to markets, and with more resources or better links internationally have been able to benefit. For women at the upper-income, upper-skill end, the quality as well as opportunities for employment have improved. For most women workers however, the quality of employment is poor, without opportunities for skill development and moving up the ladder, and with very low income returns.

Today when liberalization policies are considered, the employment effect is rarely calculated by the economists and the policy makers. Thus, when severe negative effects are found in certain areas or certain sectors, there is a great amount of social discontent and often it is too late for policy makers to take any remedial measures. Economists tell us that after liberalization, poverty has reduced and that unemployment has reduced. In short, it has had an overall positive effect. However, many organisations of workers such as trade unions, some farmers associations and other activist organisations are very much opposed to liberalization as they themselves are feeling negative effects of liberalization. The main fear of the workers is that they will lose their employment and that is in fact what is happening to many different workers.

If we examine the impact of globalization on the employment and income of women workers, four distinct trends are visible. First is loss of existing employment without creation of new employment, secondly, changes due to new technologies and skills, third is the informalisation of work and finally, creation of new employment opportunities

Loss Of Existing Employment Without Creation Of New Employment

Liberalization has in some sectors caused loss of employment without creation of new employment. This happens when an Indian product is displaced by imports from the market. Thousands of women silk spinners and twistors of Bihar have totally lost their employment due to the import of “China-Korea” silk yarn. Weavers and consumers prefer this yarn as it is somewhat cheaper and also with a shine.

Similar displacement has come with the entry of large fishing vessels into the Indian waters. These vessels take away the fish that would be collected by Indian fishing vessels, thereby destroying the employment of fishermen and women fish sorters, dryers, vendors and net-makers. In Gujarat, women gum collectors, who were picking from the *proscopis julifera* (Baval) trees, lost their employment due to the import of cheaper gum from Sudan. In almost all cities of India, the rag pickers lost some of their employment due to import of waste paper from developed countries.

The displacement of street vendors is one such example. It is estimated that in India 10 million women and men depend on vending commodities for their livelihood.ⁱⁱ Mumbai has the largest number, around 200,000. Street vending is major employment area for women in both urban and rural areas. In the last five

years there has been a major pressure on vendors, which can certainly be traced to Globalisation. In the urban areas, there has been a tremendous increase of vehicular traffic due to opening of the automobile markets. Indian cities too are now being planned and built like Northern cities with multi-storey complexes and separation of commercial centres. This has caused great pressures on existing infrastructures and large investments and rebuilding. The street vendor is now perceived as a 'nuisance' in the way of infrastructure, and is being removed wholesale. The Indian middle-class too now perceives Singapore and Dubai as its model cities, with no place for the street vendor. In the rural areas, there is an increasing pressure on the rural *haats* as the space that was traditionally reserved for them is now being privatised and used for other purposes.

There are also indirect effects of globalisation, where global cultural and social norms begin to effect employment in India. An example is the anti-tobacco campaign, which is beginning to cause a reduction in the work available to bidi workers. Another indirect effect of liberalization has been the growth of concern about the environment. As part of this concern, employment and environment are often counterpoised to each other and in recent years, environment issues have taken precedence over employment and where industries have been shut down causing large scale job loss. This has been especially true in judgments of the Supreme and High Courts. In Delhi, for example, nearly one lakh workers lost their jobs with the closing of small and homebased industries.

Employment Changes Due to Mechanisation and New Technology

Women are the most affected by the changes due to mechanisation. The employment of manual workers is reduced and is displaced by workers who run the machines. In these cases the total number of jobs is reduced drastically. Moreover, women are generally replaced by men, although the income earned may actually increase. There are many examples of this.

In the agricultural sector men have taken over from women those activities in which technology has substituted machinery for manual labour. All other labour intensive tasks are still left to women. Therefore, the introduction of tractors, harvesters, insecticides, weedicides, hormone accelerators, high yielding variety seeds and mechanical cotton pickers has meant that tasks traditionally performed by women and on which many women depend for their livelihood have been appropriated.

Various micro studies have shown that technical change has eliminated many jobs traditionally performed by women and alternative job opportunities have not been created for women at the same rate as for men. Weeding in paddy producing areas is a female dominated task. When chemical spraying replaces weeding, the spraying is performed by men. Similarly, the introduction of rice mills has displaced hand pounding done by rural women. Rice mills utilize husking equipment with the consequence that women who use traditional husking mechanisms have lost their means of livelihood.

In some sub sectors in the textile and garment industry, mechanization has displaced women workers. For instance, the replacement of hand-wheels by power winders had displaced a large chunk of the female workforce. A single worker using a power-operated winder is capable of winding four to five times more yarn than a woman worker, winding on a hand-wheel. By replacing hand-operated wheels with power-winders, the employer not only benefits economically, but also saves space and time.

In the hosiery industry, women workers are engaged for stitching certain types of button which could not be stitched by machine. In button stitching, machines are exclusively operated by male workers and in manual stitching only female workers are engaged. Each machine operative displaced nearly six manual women workers in this small process. In the textile sector, handloom spinners and weavers are being rapidly replaced by power looms, and power loom workers with lesser quality machines are being displaced by those with better quality machines. The spinners and winders being mainly women are being displaced completely. Handloom weavers are both men and women and are losing work, whereas, powerloom workers are mainly men. At the same time the powerlooms which are being displaced are those that are in small worksheds or homebased, where more women are working

A large number of women workers are employed in the construction industry. According to NSSO Survey (1993-94), 4.17 per cent of all male workers and 1.27 per cent of all female workers were engaged in construction activity. Among women construction workers more than 98 per cent are casual workers, whereas the proportion of casual workers among women workers in all industries together is far less, about 75 per cent.ⁱⁱⁱ

In Construction under the prevailing WTO regime, the essential requirement of global tendering has facilitated the entry of many large companies in the Indian construction scene in a big way. The presence of some of these companies is increasingly visible in many infrastructure development projects being undertaken under government funding as well as under bilateral/multilateral assistance arrangements. With increased mechanisation, there would be massive displacement of labour in nearly all construction operations. Women labour would be completely eliminated from the main operations in which they have been traditionally deployed, namely, soil digging and carrying, carrying inputs in concrete mixing and placing, concrete curing and brick carrying. It is estimated that the overall deployment of labour will become 1/50th to 1/5th of the earlier numbers. Obviously manual labour, and especially the women workers, would be increasingly eliminated from the construction sites.

Categories of Construction Workers according to Type of Skills

Workers' group	Presence of women workers	Workers' group	Presence of women workers
(a) Unskilled workers		(c) Skilled Workers	
Weight Lifter	High	White washer	Nil
Dust Lifter	High	Sand blast operator	Nil
Digging Worker	High	Carpenter	Nil
Watchman	Nil	Plastering Operator	Nil
Waterman	Medium	Mason	Low
Centering Worker	Nil	Title fitter	Nil
(b) Semi-Skilled Workers		Painter	Nil
Steel Bender	Nil	Plumber (iron)	Nil
Concrete Mixer	Low	Cement finisher	Nil
Brick layer	Low	Glazier	Nil
Glass fitter	Nil	Electrician	Nil
Scaffolder	Nil	Blacksmith	Nil
		Pipe lifter (cement)	Nil
		Machine operator	Nil
		White washer	Nil

Source: Subramaniam (1982).

On the other hand there would be an increase in factory production as well as a growth in the need for various construction skills such as masons, tile fitters, painters, plumbers, cement finishers, glaziers, electricians etc. Unfortunately, there are practically no women with these skills.

In the food-processing sector, as the domestic big companies and multinationals with huge investments and state of the art technology are entering the processed food sector in a big way, they are pushing out small and unorganised units out of the market. In the country's manufacturing sector, (including organised as well as unorganised sectors) food processing is the fourth largest employer of women. It is estimated that nearly 3.10 lakhs women workers (0.35 per cent of total women workforce) are employed in this sector, mostly in the unorganized segment of the industry. This is in addition to 2.92 lakhs (0.37 per cent) deployed in grain mill sector^{iv}. Due to lack of finance, access to latest technologies and modern quality control facilities, these units are not able to meet the required high quality standards and take up production of new range of attractive products for a rapidly changing market. The proportion of women in the total workforce has been declining since 1981 showing a slight increase in 1992 and 1993. Similarly, the female/male ratio has also been decreasing. There is also a decline in the average number of women workers per manufacturing unit since 1981; from a figure of 21.7 in 1981 to 14.8 in 1982. (See table) Clearly, as the food processing industry is becoming increasingly modernized, women workers who work at the

lowest rungs in labour hierarchy are going to be far more adversely affected than their male counterparts.

Year-wise Deployment of Women Workers in Food Processing Industry

Year	Percentage of Female workforce	Female/male ratio
1981	24.3	0.32
1986	19.7	0.24
1991	17.4	0.21
1992	19.3	0.24
1993	19.5	0.24

Note: Figures exclude manufacture of beverages.

Source: Compiled from Table 2.3, Labour Bureau (1998).

Year-wise Number of women workers per manufacturing unit

Year	Number of women workers per manufacturing unit
1981	21.7
1983	18.2
1986	16.0
1992	14.8

Note: Figures exclude manufacture of beverages.

Source: Compiled from Table 2.3, Labour Bureau (1998).

In the screen printing industry of Ahmedabad, mechanization has reduced employment by nearly fifty percent. Recent mechanization in zari embroidery has displaced many home based women who did zari embroidery by hand.

Employment Changes due to Informalisation

One of the major debates today is on the casualisation of the work-force. Casualisation is causing increased employment opportunities for some of the workforce and loss of jobs for others. On the whole, casualisation displaces the better-paid, more protected workers and increases insecure and low-paid employment. The numbers of employment opportunities created by casualisation certainly are more, but they are also in worse conditions. On the whole, men lose jobs and women gain them. In our studies we found that the largest employment change was in the industrial subcontracting sector.

Many big companies, including multinational corporations have evolved a vendor system of subcontracting for their production. Depending on the nature of work, some of these vendors either employ women workers in large numbers or give out work to home-based workers mostly through contractors. (e.g. Maruti Udyog

Ltd., BPL, Johnson & Johnson Ltd., TELCO, Elin Electronics, and Hindustan Lever Ltd.)

Many times big corporates in heavy industry sector have a very big inventory of plant accessories required in their plants on a regular basis. Some companies have set up cooperatives of women living in the vicinity of their plants for production of such items. (*Examples: Steel Authority of India Ltd. and Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd*). Yet other companies have a subcontracting arrangement. Established companies give out work to small units in the organised/unorganised sector which in turn outsource some simple operations to home-based workers. The company often mediates with these units/workers through contractors who get the production work done and delivers the output to the company (*Examples: Finishing and quality control, assembling, sorting, packaging and labeling*). Many medium and small scale industries in the organised sector and production units in the unorganised sector subcontract work to home-based women workers. Generally the manufacturers establish direct contacts with these workers and sometimes even act as contractors for bigger companies.

Subcontracting of work given out to home-based workers has been found to be widespread in the unorganised manufacturing sector and seems to have expanded phenomenally over the past decade. In almost 90 per cent of the households in the resettlement colonies and slum areas surveyed, at least one woman was reported to be doing some kind of home-based work. However, the types of jobs created in this way are irregular and low-paid. In the manufacturing trades (except garments), the work is extremely irregular; the average deployment time was less than four months in a year. In the home-based sector, earnings of the women workers in all trades were abysmally low, far below the minimum wage. The average monthly earning in technical trades was Rs. 450.

Creation of New Employment Opportunities

There are many areas where new employment opportunities for women have been created without loss for anyone else. Employment opportunities increase when there is opening of a new market or expansion of an existing market. These markets may be within the country or for export.

In the crafts sector for example, employment has grown at a fast pace, including for women. This sector now directly links a big traditional rural economy with the far distant metropolitan and global markets, providing visibility to a large number of artisans through their work. The sector witnessed a dramatic increase in number of crafts-persons; from 48.25 lakhs persons during 1991-92 to 81.05 lakhs in 1997-98^v. Trends continue to indicate that while male participation in crafts has been slowly decreasing over the years, female participation is on the rise, particularly in rural home-based crafts sector^{vi}.

The proportion of women employed in different handicrafts varies from a low of 40 per cent to a high of nearly 80 to 90 per cent^{vii}. Women artisans dominate in

trades like decoration of cloth (embroidery and lace making), coir work, cane and bamboo craft, dyeing and bleaching of textiles, earthenware, reed mat making, artistic leatherware, weaving and papier mache. However, over the years, women have also started entering those craft areas traditionally considered to be male bastions, namely, stone carving, metal work and wood work. The number of women handicrafts artisans getting the recognition of master crafts-persons is also increasing over the years.

However the average daily earnings of women crafts workers are low, nearly half of that paid to male workers. Women engaged in hand printed textiles get the maximum rates followed by the cane-bamboo making industry and zari work. The wage rate in three women- dominated crafts - lace work, reed mat making and leatherware - is extremely low. In fact, all crafts indicate a status quo in wages over the years. As in other industries in the unorganised sector, the payment of wages to artisans is on piece rate basis. For the crafts-persons, the predominant channel for marketing their produce is the vast network of middlemen/traders as nearly 93 per cent of the artisans disposed their products through this channel. Only 3 per cent of the crafts-persons undertook direct export activities although 46 per cent of the self-employed artisans were aware of the final destination of their products^{viii}.

Another area of expanding opportunities is in services of all types. Personal services such as domestic work, cleaning and cooking services and care of children and the elderly, is increasing rapidly in the urban areas. Most of these services are provided by women. However, even in these areas, the earnings remain low and work remains irregular. Health services are another area of expansion. India has always had a very large private medical sector, especially for non-hospital care. The slowing down of state investment in the hospital sector was in itself a signal to the private sector, and the state supported this by giving subsidies, soft loans, duty and tax exemptions, etc. Secondly, the earlier introduction of modern health care in the rural areas by the state through the setting up of PHCs and cottage hospitals had paved the way for the private sector, by creating a market for modern health care in the peripheral regions. Also the number of specialists being churned out has increased tremendously and their demand in the west is comparatively reduced and this too may have played a role in private hospital growth because most specialists prefer hospital practice.

The livestock area is another sector where there is an increase especially for women. With globalisation, prospects of export of milk and milk products seem bright. Since India does not provide any subsidy to its milk producers, with the withdrawal of subsidies under WTO agreements, India will become price competitive. India's proximity to major dairy markets (Middle-East, South-East Asia, North Africa) is another advantage. Countries like Malaysia, Philippines and South Korea are importing more than 95 per cent of their milk consumption. Even

Thailand imports around four-fifths of its milk requirements. Given the low overhead cost and inexpensive family labour, India's dairy sector is quite competitive.

Women play predominant role in dairy operations mainly carried out within the household. These include milking, feeding and bathing of animals, processing of milk and cleaning of cattle shed and most importantly in processing of milk. A survey of households^{ix} engaged in dairy from four villages in Punjab, bring out that women's share in dairy work is around 64 per cent of the family labour and nearly 54 per cent of the total labour (including hired labour).^x The most important operation, in terms of time expend, is fodder collection and women play a predominant role in this. In spite of being the main workers in this sector, unfortunately, women's role in this sector is not properly appreciated and they are not even counted in the censuses, they are rarely members of the milk co-operatives and they do not receive the training that is required for increasing the productivity of the animals.

Another growing area of employment is the manufacture of garments and associated work. There is growth in both the domestic and export markets. The opportunities for employment of women workers are on the increase in this sector but a large percentage of the new employment generated is sub-contractual, home-based work.

Also, growth due to micro-finance. When a woman joins a microfinance programme, it also gears up the process of capitalisation in her life. The moment she starts saving, she builds up an asset over the period of time which ultimately helps her in either starting up a new enterprise or upgrading her existing one, or to meet future consumption expenditures. Studies have shown that micro-finance enhances women's employment and livelihoods in a number of ways. She is able to take a loan to increase her working capital and hence earnings. She is also able to take a loan to buy working tools. She is often able to diversify into new types of employments and hence spread the risk of her work. She is able to finance growth of employment not only for herself but also for her family, especially her children.

WAGES

Even in sectors where liberalization has increased employment women workers are getting paid less than men and, in most cases, much below the minimum wage. It is unjust that a worker spends many hours at difficult work and does not even earn enough to feed herself and her family. It is surprising, that even when opportunities have increased, women are earning a pittance. One study shows many large companies are subcontracting work to small factories and to homebased workers. The women are earning barely Rs.500 per month, whereas the minimum wage is Rs 1500 and a worker in a private sector factory, doing the same work would earn at least Rs. 3000. Some times workers are paid on a piece rate basis. Waste-pickers are paid by the kilo of paper or plastic collected by the wholesalers, and earn Rs. 25-30 per day. Sharecroppers are paid by a

share of crop and get only one-fourth share (if they only put in labour). These are all 'piece-rated' methods of payment to a worker, by a person who has complete control over the worker and the product.

For the majority of women engaged in paid economic activity, the fact of being female means being paid less than men for their work. Gender based wage disparities exist across all sectors and all occupations. One study^{xi} calculated the earnings differentials for the year 1989, 1991 and 1995 for manufacturing, plantations, tea and mines. Earning differentials are higher in the manufacturing and tea sectors and are lowest for plantation. Manufacturing sector appears to be the most discriminatory towards women.

There is enough evidence that women are paid less than men for the same work. Coupled with gender discrimination in wage differentials is inequality in access to superior positions and promotions. Women are often seen in the lower categories of the job hierarchy. Discrimination exists not only in terms of wages but also in terms of access to employment. Often women are found concentrated in occupations where the wage rates, as well as working conditions are poor and substandard. Low levels of skill on entry, lack of access to on the job training, employment histories punctuated by time spent bearing and raising children, time off to care for family members and the assumption that men are the primary earners all contribute to the implicit assumption that women should be paid less than men.

Skills

With the coming of Globalisation and liberalization, new technologies and fast changing markets tend to make existing skills obsolete and require upgradation, new skills and multi-skilling. Globalisation often puts a premium on skills - requiring high levels of education, often out of the reach of the unorganised sector workers. On the other hand it opens up new markets which workers can reach by adapting existing or traditional skills.

Women workers are usually at the lowest-paid end of any sector, they are usually termed as unskilled, even though very often their work, though low-paid, requires a certain level of technique. Furthermore, many of the skills that women learn are those that are in some way connected to care and reproduction, which are often not regarded as skills at all. For example, some skills which are not recognized now, but which exist with local populations -- women in forest areas, have a skill of recognizing and using herbal plants. Often a woman's skills may not be regarded as skills at all, either by the person who is documenting the skills, or even by the women themselves. Secondly, the potential marketability of a particular skill is never recognized. This refers to a woman's skills which currently may not be marketed but which may have a good market potential like embroidery or knowledge of herbs. Finally, the 'care' skills of the women can no longer be sidelined. These would include knowledge of child-care, care of the

sick and particular skills such as mid-wifery. Only then will a measurement of a women's skill will capture the extent of her 'specialization'. One unfortunate tendency that has been noticed in the desperate search for employment that goes on in the unorganised sector is the tendency towards deskilling. Workers lose their traditional or acquired skills when they cannot find employment with these skills.

There is the demand side of the skilling needs which captures the skilling needs at a point in time. Identifying the demand and the employment opportunities for skills is not an easy task in the Indian system, as there are few instruments available for such measurement. The task of identification of demand becomes harder because of the presence of a large informal sector in India. Even within the formal sector, there have been rapid changes which have led to changes in demand.

Social Security

Social security still eludes most workers in the informal sector, especially women workers. Existing schemes are mainly restricted to the organised sector, barely ten per cent of the Indian workforce, where employer-employee relationships can be clearly established. For the millions in the unorganised sector or informal economy, social security continues to be a missing link in their struggle for survival. And yet, it is these unorganised workers who are the poorest of workers, and are most exposed to shocks and multiple risks that threaten their very survival.

The problem is more acute for women workers. They play the triple role of a worker, housewife and mother, The lack of capital and assets, low and irregular income, aided by frequent accidents, sickness and other contingencies, poor working and living conditions, low bargaining power and lack of outside linkages and opportunities for skill upgradation - all these interlinked factors drag these women into deprivation, trapping them in the vicious circle of poverty.

Child care provisions and maternity benefits are the crucial needs for the women worker. The most productive years of a women's life are also the reproductive years of her life. In the absence of any provision for maternity leave and child care, a women worker often has to leave her job to have a child and take care of the infant. The working mother is bogged down by the burden of child care, leading to the decline in the productivity of the mother as well as negative impacts on the health of both the mother and the child. Old age Pension and insurance to cover her during crisis are her other needs.

The Indian woman worker lives and works under many constraints. She belongs to the poorer families in the village or town. She also belongs to backward caste, schedule caste or minority. Being a woman she would have a lower status in her family. Her family would own few assets and have few opportunities for better

work, and such assets or opportunities that existed would be in for the males of the family and not for her. Often, she may be a widow or live alone with her children. She faces a crushing work burden---of work for income, work for subsistence, work for the household and care work of children and aged. The policies of liberalizations have an adverse effect on her life. Even when it creates opportunities, the working conditions are very poor. Coupled with it are the trends of increasing casualization and women's lack of access to skills and technology. The shrinking role of the state further adds to her burdens. However, it is not possible to give a blanket response to counteract the destructive forces of liberalization. It has to deal with all the situations of loss and gain of employment on a case-to-case basis.

EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME

Employment should be at the centre of all economic policies. The effects of the policy on employment should be evaluated before it is put into place. In particular, policies need to be looked at in the following contexts:

Loss of Employment without any Gain

All economic policies of the Government have an impact on the employment, especially for workers in the unorganised sector. Therefore, all policies, finance policies, trade policies, industrial policy and agriculture policies need to be examined for its impact on the employment before being implemented. Policy thus will have to be examined to evaluate whether there is some way of reducing or preventing employment loss. In the fishing sector for example, it has been suggested that foreign fishing vehicles, not be allowed into the shallow waters, where the local people fish. It may also in some cases be necessary to restrict certain imports either by duties or by quantitative restrictions.

Another way of dealing with employment loss is to seriously invest in rehabilitation. Some rehabilitation schemes may in fact, not even be costly, but just need changes in the thrust of the policy. For example, the resettlement of street vendors may require merely allocation of appropriate place in the urban areas.

Changes in Employment due to Mechanisation and New Technology

The issue of mechanisation and the introduction of new technology have been the subject of debate and resistance since the industrial revolution, and on the whole, technological change tends to take place in spite of resistance. Here we propose the following approach to deal with mechanisation and new technology. Skill training and upgradation of skills for women on a widespread and continuous scale is essential. In each sector, however, the emerging required skills needs to be identified and a system of reaching skills to the unorganised sector needs to be set up. This must be the joint responsibility of Government and the Industry.

Identification and spread of appropriate technology is another way. For any task there are usually a number of different technologies available. We need to identify and promote technologies which increase productivity of the workers, and is usable by them with some training, and which has the least negative effect on employment need to be identified and promoted. Some examples are hand tillers as opposed to tractors; smaller powered and specialised stitching machines, which can be used at home or in small workshops; home-based tile and block making machines. In the food processing sector, many technologies such as cryogenic spice grinders, cryo-containers and refrigerators, quick fish freezing systems and controlled atmosphere food storage systems have already been developed by institutions like Central Food Technological Research Institute, IITs, National Physical Laboratory etc, but not yet made accessible to small producers. These technologies need to be fully exploited. Large-scale dissemination of these technologies would also give a boost to equipment manufacturing industry in the country.

Changes in Employment due to Informalisation

Again this is a much-debated question. It is certainly unfair that workers with security of work, fair incomes and social security, should be deprived of their employment. However, now the process of casualisation, or as it is called 'flexibilisation' is so widespread, that it is not useful to talk about banning it. We would rather approach the problem from the other end. How do we assure a minimum level to income and security to all workers regardless of where and under what employment relations they work? Very strict implementation of the Minimum Wages Act will go a long way in achieving this.

Increase in Employment Opportunities

There are many areas where there have been real increases in employment opportunities. However, we feel that with different policies, these opportunities can be increased even more. Many of these employment opportunities yield less income and do not have much opportunity for advancement.

Every sector needs policies, which would increase employment opportunities for women in the unorganised sector. For example, Forestry is a sector where women's employment can be increased many-fold. Reforestation is a priority for the country, and forests need to grow. Reforestation programmes of Nursery growing, plantations and tending of plants can be handed over to women's groups. Collection, processing and sale of minor forest produce are another major area. One calculation showed that if the nursery growing for the Forest department in Gujarat was done through women's groups it would increase employment for 6 months one lakh women. In the health sector, policies which would link 'informal' health providers especially midwives with the formal health system, would increase both employment and earnings of the health providers.

Increasing micro-finance would increase employment opportunities through livelihood development. Direct access to markets would increase employment

opportunities as well as earnings. Training and skill development would enhance productivity and earnings as well as opportunities.

Skills

In order to meet with the continuous upgradation of technology, it is necessary to introduce large-scale skill upgradation for women workers. Women workers can meet the challenges of globalization by developing a system of skills.

Assess the demand

First and foremost is to identify and assess the emerging opportunities and have a directory of skills required for these. For instance in the construction sector, due to growing mechanisation there is a decreasing demand for manual labour. However, the demand for skilled workers is going up. Skills that women construction workers need to be taught can be identified and women can be trained in them. Similarly, women need extensive training and skill development in the food processing sector to keep up with the rapid expansion and mechanization specifically in the sphere of technologies in food processing, preservation and quality control which would make work less labour intensive and time consuming and products of high quality

An integrated package of skill training is required for women workers in the crafts sector. The mandate of such training should include discovering and popularising languishing crafts particularly those practiced by women and helping women producers in upgrading their production methods to make more value-added products through S&T inputs and quality standards. The skill development need of a sector will be specific to the sector.

In addition women workers need to be trained in management and accounting skills: The forms of organisations are changing fast. Today's production systems rely on small, flexible organisations. The management of such organisations calls for skills of communication, interlinking and updating knowledge.

Build New Tiers of Skill Training

The demand side for use of skills is employment opportunities. The present disparities between the small number of formal skilled workers and the large numbers of informal workers, who are considered 'unskilled', can only be bridged if we are able to create a continuum of skills from the highest to the lowest. In order to reach skills to a much larger number of workers, we need to build new tiers of skills through training. We need to build many different tiers of skills training. This should be sector wise with special attention to growing sectors such as services and Looking at possibilities of linking the organised and unorganised sector

The tiers would have to be built after recognising the different needs emerging in the economy as well as the existing skills, with the workers. For example, in the health sector the following tiers could be identified: Doctors (with the various levels of specialisation that already exist), Nurses, Para-nurses, Midwives (with

various levels of competence), Traditional healers (with various levels of competence), Community health workers etc. Similarly paravets and hand pump mechanics are other examples. We need to build up infrastructure to train at each of these levels of skills. A system of continuous learning must be established whereby a person can move from one 'threshold' to another as her competence and experience grows.

Special Focus on Women Workers

Due to most people's cultural and social orientations, women are rarely taught skills that are considered 'male work'. Most existing courses confine women to skills like stitching and typing, whereas the better paid skills like plumbing and masonry are reserved for men. However, many women are losing employment, due to mechanisation, in sectors where they were traditionally employed, such as construction and agriculture. It is necessary that women who already have a base and therefore some skills in these sectors be taught the new emerging techniques so as to retain employment.

At the same time it is important to help younger women to break into the higher paid employments that were traditionally reserved for men. This is happening at a fast pace at the upper echelons, where women have become pilots and managers and architects and priests. But in the unorganised sector, very few women have been able to enter into 'non-traditional' areas.

Continuous Trainings

In the Indian training system, the main emphasis is placed on the training of the young student. Thereafter, he or she is supposed to acquire skills at her own initiative and in her own way. Although in the formal system, there are courses for mid-life professionals and refresher courses of various types, this is not true in the unorganised sector. However, given the fast-changing technology and markets that the workers face in the era of globalisation, it becomes important that she should have the opportunity to change or upgrade or refresh her skill from time to time.

Another reason for the requirement for continuous training is the need to build 'tiers' of trained workers. A woman who trains in a certain skill, will after certain time of experience want to take herself to the next level of skill. For example a woman trains in say the growing of plant nurseries. She may then grow nurseries on her own or she may work for a bigger nursery or for the Forest department. After some time she will notice that certain types of special plants like grafted plants or newer species, have a better market. She may then wish to go for a training to upgrade her skills in plant management, as also her knowledge of markets, so that she moves to the next tier of skill and earning.

Creating Infrastructure for Training

Building Human Infrastructure. The main infrastructure required are the human resource---the teachers. Most workers in the unorganised sector learn their skill

in totally informal ways from relatives, neighbours or on the job. Women often learn from their mothers. A mix of the informal and formal ways of teaching can be developed. First, by encouraging traditional teaching methods such as Guru-Shishya, Ustad-shagird, Mother-daughter, and by upgrading the skills of the teachers and providing them with the tools, equipment and space they require. Second, by encouraging existing teachers in the formal systems—ITI, Agricultural Universities etc.—to adapt their teaching methods to the educational and knowledge levels of the students. Third, by encouraging the apprenticeship system especially in private sector enterprises, and finally, by introducing local workers (farmers, crafts persons etc) as part-time teachers into the school systems, as part of vocationalising education.

Building Physical Infrastructure A great deal of resources should be spent on building new physical infrastructure. Multi-use of existing training facilities, use of public spaces like panchayat buildings, use of private space, on the job space etc. should be used. A system of accreditation should be developed to ensure a minimum quality as well as to increase the marketability of the skill. For the unorganised sector, a different, more informal system of accreditation system should be set up. In each area some organisations can be designated to recognize and accredit institutions and courses. The criteria for recognition should be transparent and simple, but the main criterion should be the effectiveness of the courses and the teaching method. The role of the existing formal institutions would be to give approval to such systems.

Financing

Building up this system of skills and training in the unorganised sector will require a great deal of financing. This is an important investment in the future economy. It is necessary to avoid the growing inequality and social discontent that is coming about due to the changes through liberalization.

The financing needs to come from a number of sources. The main source is the Government. Central government departments can build training and skill development into many of their programs. New projects grants and loans can also have a component of training. The existing successful schemes can be vastly expanded. Yet another source of finance needs to be from the funds which finance the existing professional trainings. The second component is the contribution from the private sector. Training and skill development is vital to the growth of the formal sector and they need to work out ways in which they can contribute to its growth. Finally, it is important to charge the trainee. These training courses will be useful only if they are of good quality and marketability. The trainees will come to these courses only if they think that they can benefit by enhancing their livelihood. Payment of a fee will ensure that only those courses which have the quality and marketability will survive. Of course, the size of the fee should be commensurate with the income levels of the target groups.

Social Security

Any scheme of social security which has to benefit women workers must be decentralised, flexible, user responsive, contributory and open to multi-financing, keeping in mind their special needs.

Child Care needs to be made the responsibility not only of the woman worker, but also of the family and of the state. The mechanisms of providing child care could be multi-dimensional. First, all labour legislation should include provision of crèche where there are 10 or more workers irrespective of the gender of the worker so that whether the worker is a mother or father, the child can be brought into the crèche. Second, it should be included within the ICDS program. ICDS currently caters to only 3-6 age group and only for a three hours in a day. Third, child care should be recognised as part of the education policy. Fourth, low-cost community based approaches should be encouraged and multiplied. Fifth, the important role of child care worker should be recognised and compensated.

A statutory scheme for the implementation of maternity entitlements which would cover all women, under an income criterion. The scheme would provide financial support for childbirth and childcare and breastfeeding in the first few months of the child's life. The funds would be multi-sourced including a combination of employer, employee and state contributions, through cesses and through community contributions. It can be linked with the maternal and child health provisions of the public health system.

Welfare Funds have been shown as the most effective way in reaching social security to workers without a clear employer-employee relationship. However, they should also be more women-sensitive. However, their structure should be changed to make them more decentralised, reach more benefits and become more efficient.

A pension scheme within the existing Provident Fund Act can be devised for women workers in the unorganized sector which would provide them coverage for old age, disability and widowhood. Different schemes with different rates for different categories of women workers in the unorganized sector could be formulated. The benefits would be a flat rate benefit linked to the number of years of contribution and the quantum or the total of the individual running account. The Government would also be required to contribute.

Health Insurance is a major need for workers. It is found that health expenses is the largest major source of debt. At present women workers especially in the unorganised sector have no access to any form of health insurance such as the ESIS scheme. It is necessary to promote forms of insurance for these workers. There are a number of successful micro-insurance schemes which could be upscaled.

Getting a voice

Women workers continue to be at the receiving end of policies often getting victimised in the process. They have no say in the formulation of the policies as they have no voice in economic affairs. Perhaps the most important actions are to help these women to organise and to help their organisations to get representation to policy making forums. In India today there are in fact many organisations of women workers, but they tend to work against many odds. It is necessary to recognise that these organisations exist to help them to grow and to give them a voice.

ⁱ This article is based on studies commissioned by the Group on Women and Child Labour of the Second National Commission on Labour. The sectors studied are construction, crafts, agriculture, livestock, forestry, food processing including fish processing, textile and garments, subcontracting in manufacturing, banking, nursing, traditional health workers and vendors.

ⁱⁱ Sharit Bhowmik report

ⁱⁱⁱ Deshpande and Deshpande (1998).

^{iv} Gopalan, 1995

^v Annual Report, Ministry of Textiles, 1998-99

^{vi} Krishnaraj, 1992

^{vii} Krishnaraj and Deshmukh, 1990

^{viii} Vijayagopalan, 1993

^{ix} An NCAER study under preparation.

^x There is widespread underestimation of dairy labour in general and female share in particular. Take the example of Punjab. The state having 8.4 million milch cattle. The average time spent per animal as per NCAER (1988) study is little less than 3 hours. (lower than Indian average due to widespread practice of stall feeding) This therefore should generate around 3 million person years of employment. However, 1991 Census data tells us that only around 50,000 total workers are engaged in the care of livestock (including forestry, fishing, hunting, plantations etc.) and number of women workers is less than 3000; just one in every four villages.

^x Neetha N., 2000.

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